Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland House Appropriations Committee
By Rodrigo Trevino, Assistant professor
HB0661
State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Faculty
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FAVORABLE

Good afternoon Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and members of the House Appropriations Committee,

My name is Rodrigo Trevi?o, and I am an Assistant Professor of Mathematics at the University of Maryland, College Park, where I have worked for the past eight years. I am also a proud alumnus of the University of Maryland. I am here today to urge this committee to issue a favorable report on this bill.

Maryland already grants collective bargaining rights to nearly all state employees, including faculty at community colleges and non-academic staff at four-year institutions. It is only fair and logical that these rights be extended to all higher education workers in Maryland.

Over the past decade, there has been a systematic erosion of faculty rights and an increasing disregard for shared governance within our university system. Faculty voices have been stifled by an administration that refuses to engage with us in meaningful dialogue. This suppression has serious consequences, which I will illustrate with two key examples.

1. The Breakdown of Shared Governance

I work in the College of Computer, Mathematical, and Natural Sciences. The college's governing document, the Plan of Organization, requires the Dean to convene the College Council at least once per semester. The purpose of the Council is to provide a forum where stakeholders across the college can discuss key issues and advise the Dean on matters affecting the college.

Despite this requirement, the College Council has not convened in over seven years.

Repeated faculty requests to reinstate these meetings have been ignored by the Dean. Appeals to higher administration, including the Provost, have also gone unanswered. This failure to convene the Council is not just a procedural oversight--it represents the dismantling of a crucial mechanism for faculty participation in decision-making and accountability.

When governance structures meant to ensure faculty representation and oversight are deliberately abandoned, the result is an unchecked concentration of power, lack of transparency, and an environment ripe for abuse.

2. The Weaponization of Confidentiality

At both the college and university levels, confidentiality has been weaponized to intimidate faculty and deter oversight. Instead of being used to protect the vulnerable, it has become a tool to silence dissent and conceal questionable administrative practices.

a) Threats Against Faculty Over Promotion Transparency

On May 28, 2024, Associate Provost John Bertot issued a memo threatening disciplinary action against faculty who disclosed aspects of the promotion process. This policy was imposed without exceptions, even in cases where faculty might be exposing illegal discrimination or retaliation.

Not only is this directly contrary to university policy, but under university governance rules, any designation of confidentiality with punitive consequences must be approved by the University Senate--which it was not. This unilateral action is a blatant attempt to silence faculty concerns and erode shared governance.

b) Suppressing a Departmental Review Report

A more recent example occurred within my own department. The department underwent a routine external review, where three professors from other institutions assessed the department and produced a report.

University policy explicitly states that the chair of the unit under review must distribute this report to faculty immediately upon receipt. However, instead of following this policy, the department chair:

i) Prohibited faculty from accessing the report freely, requiring them to visit his office to read it.

ii) Declared the report confidential, in collaboration with the Dean, despite no university policy justifying such a designation.

iii)One month later, faculty were required to sign a legal document agreeing not to discuss the report with anyone unauthorized. This document also included an explicit threat: faculty who discussed the report faced disciplinary action--a direct violation of university policy and an alarming overreach of power.

As a publicly funded institution, this report is of public interest. The fact that university administrators sought to hide the findings from faculty and the public is an affront to transparency, a violation of Maryland taxpayers' trust, and another example of the administration's disregard for shared governance.

As egregious as these cases are, they pale in comparison to what I am about to share.

Last November, I filed a federal lawsuit against the university for discrimination and retaliation related to the promotion process. Before filing, I had repeatedly opposed discriminatory and retaliatory actions by department administrators. In response to my repeated opposition to discriminatory and retaliatory practices, at my most vulnerable moment, the chair of my department and others enacted a campaign of retaliation aimed at ending my career.

This retaliation was widely recognized by senior faculty, who reported it to the university administration. The administration did nothing to stop it or mitigate its damaging effects. Their inaction emboldened the perpetrators, who continued their campaign unchecked for months.

I urge this committee to read my lawsuit. It lays out in detail how the administration failed to protect vulnerable faculty and allowed retaliation to persist. None of this would have happened if faculty had the right to organize.

If shared governance had been empowered, if faculty had a collective voice to hold the administration accountable, I would not be writing this testimony to you.

There are many reasons why you should support this bill:

(I) Public Interest and Accountability - Maryland's public universities must be transparent and accountable to taxpayers. Faculty participation in governance is critical to preventing corruption and administrative overreach.

(II) Equity and Representation - The demographics of my college do not reflect the demographics of the state of Maryland. The university cannot reach its full potential if faculty who advocate for diversity and inclusion in STEM are targeted for retaliation.

(III) Fiscal Responsibility - The lawsuit I filed against the university is costing Maryland taxpayers thousands of dollars in legal fees, a waste of public resources that could have been avoided with proper oversight and accountability mechanisms.

If the administration's unchecked authority continues, more lawsuits will follow, draining more taxpayer dollars and further weakening Maryland's higher education system.

Let me state the obvious: the working conditions of faculty are the learning conditions of students. The University of Maryland is one of the premier research institutions in the nation. It has tremendous potential to cultivate the talent of Maryland's students and researchers, but as long as faculty cannot thrive, students' success will also be stunted.

Members of the Committee, for decades, this state has recognized collective bargaining as a fundamental right and a critical tool for promoting democracy in our workplaces and public institutions. This right has been granted to many public higher education institutions across the country and to prestigious private institutions in Maryland. There is no legitimate reason why four-year public institutions should be exempt. I urge this committee to issue a favorable report on this bill. It is time to restore accountability, protect faculty rights, and safeguard the integrity of Maryland's higher education system.

Sincerely,

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This testimony has been submitted on behalf of this individual by the United Academics of Maryland.